

"A Reporter at Armageddon"

THE Armageddon that Will Irwin describes in his reprinted pieces gathered together in book form is not the battlefield, the No Man's Land, those dreary expanses of desolation and death in France that have grown to be the present day connotation of that Biblical name. On the contrary, it is the civilian world far behind the war zone, as it was affected by war conditions in the spring and summer of 1917, that he describes with so much humor, charm and picturesque touch. European news comes to us so plentifully in these days and is read so avidly that what happened in 1917 seems a very familiar tale that has been swept away into the past, overshadowed by the thrill of the American army's triumphant participation in the war and by the no less keenly felt triumphs of our allies. But man's interest in mankind loses



WILL IRWIN
AUTHOR OF "A REPORTER AT ARMAGEDDON"

no whit of its keenness even in the stirring days of war; and it is for that reason we find so much to admire in Will Irwin's pages.

His reporter's tales begin with a description of a March passage across the Atlantic to Cadiz on a Spanish steamer with its attendant discomforts of body and perturbation of mind over passports. The reader follows him to Madrid, pausing for some admiring phrases for the beauty of the women of the Spanish capital and for the city itself, and then goes with him to every reporter's real destination in these war times, Paris. Mr. Irwin indulges himself in the inevitable "daily hate" by his tales of how the Germans treated the American relief workers in Belgium and the brutalities and repression inflicted on the Belgians themselves. But, this chapter aside, his narrative runs to the sunnier side of life, not alone in Paris, but as it is displayed in a British air force camp back of the lines.

He is at his best in his descriptions of *The American Vanguard* in Paris and his glowing, animated accounts of the celebration by French and Americans of the Fourth and Fourteenth of July, two national holidays that now seem, as they probably will for many years to come, as a common heritage, a common cause for celebration. His pictures of the welcome the American soldiers received by the people of Paris are masterpieces of description through which sounds, in a deeper cadence, the reaction of France to what Pershing meant to convey by his speech, "Lafayette, we are here." His days in Switzerland (where Armageddon is brought very near through the tales of the interned British prisoners, victims of German barbarities) and Italy are equally interesting, as is his one picture of being at the Italian front under fire. For a more personal touch Mr. Irwin finishes his book with some sketches of his experiences "doing a turn with oratory" for a week at the Y. M. C. A. huts for the American soldiers. One may believe Mr. Irwin gave his soldier auditors as much pleasure with his "oratory" as his readers will find in these pages.

A-REPORTER AT ARMAGEDDON. By Will Irwin. D. Appleton & Co. \$1.50.

"Cheerful---By Request": Edna Ferber's Stories

By DOROTHY SCARBOROUGH.

EDNA FERBER'S new volume, *Cheerful---By Request*, is the best collection of short stories that she has yet written.

And that is saying a good deal, for she has done some admirable work. The stories included here have all been published previously in magazines, so that it is like meeting old friends to see them in book form. One remembers the characters in Miss Ferber's fiction, and the themes she develops, even though one may forget the titles of the stories or the time of their publication. Her work has a satisfying sense of actuality about it that many of the current magazine stories lack.

Future historians of present day American fiction will do well to pay especial attention to the writing of Edna Ferber. Her work has an Americanness that gives it a particular appeal. It is frank, spontaneous and open hearted; expressive of the bigness of American qualities. It is also rather crude in certain respects, as are the people she represents, but it is a crudeness that is of the surface only, and that does not reach to the spirit.

Breadth, Woman's Feeling.

Miss Ferber's stories have a human quality that is not common. Here is a writer who knows life, who senses its meanings as well as its manifestations, who can interpret as well as reveal it. Miss Ferber's fiction shows a broad, masculine knowledge of life in varied aspects, combined with an intuitive sympathy that is essentially woman's. She can look beneath the drab exterior of life and see the heart of it. She can study a commonplace character and show the thwarted dreams, the frustrated hopes, the slow attrition of ambition and inspiration that a casual observer would not comprehend.

Miss Ferber is particularly good in her studies of family life. The average middle class homes in small villages, the ordinary flats in cities, have their walls withdrawn for her so that she can see their realities, spiritual as well as material. We see through her eyes the petty selfishness of certain mothers and sisters, the beautiful, hopeless sacrifice that sons and daughters sometimes make. *The Gay Old Dog* is an admirable picture of an American home, and of the martyrdom of an older brother, as *The Eldest* shows the desolate bitterness of the sister who gives up her life for her family.

Her Stageful.

The present collection shows an interesting variety of American types, stage characters, shop girls, women in the home—wives, spinsters, young girls—soldiers and sailors, Paris buyers for American firms, officials in hotels and workers of all kinds. Miss Ferber is less happy in depicting foreign types, however, for her Italians are overdrawn, her French people lack individuality, and her one Englishwoman, "the guiding Miss Goud," in Rome, is less natural than any of the American women in the book. Miss Ferber's success lies in portraying her own compatriots.

There is a good deal of humor in the book, rather philosophic humor that is sometimes touched with bitterness—not Miss Ferber's own—revealing a keen observation of life and a searching comprehension of character. The sardonic wit of Josie Fifer, keeper of the wardrobe of Hahn and Lohman, is amusing but pathetic as well. But the description of the two scared awkward sailors at a ball has no sadness in it.

Two at a Ball.

"Tyler Kamps and Gunner Moran were standing in the crowded doorway of the ballroom upstairs, in a panic lest some girl should ask them to dance; fearful lest they be passed by. Little Miss Hall had brought them to the very door, had left them there with a stern injunction not to move, and had sped away in search of partners for them."

"Gunner Moran's great scarlet hands were knotted into fists. His Adam's apple worked convulsively."

"Let's duck," he whispered hoarsely. The jackie band in the corner crashed into the opening bars of a fox trot."

"Oh, it don't seem— But it was plain that Tyler was weakening. Another moment and they would have turned and fled. But coming toward them was little Miss Hall, her blond head bobbing in and out among the swaying couples. At her right and left was a girl. Her bright eyes held her two victims in the doorway."



They watched her approach and were helpless to flee. They seemed to be gripped by a horrible fascination. Their limbs were fluid.

"A sort of groan rent Moran. Miss Hall and the two girls stood before them cool, smiling, unruffled."

What Editors Say.

The editorial demand for cheerful stories is satirized in the title story, *Cheerful---By Request*.

"The editor paid for the lunch (as editors do). He lighted his seventh cigarette and leaned back. The conversation, which had zigzagged from the war to Zulu, and from Rasputin the Monk to the number of miles a Darrow would go on a gallon, narrowed down to the thin, straight line of business."

"Now don't misunderstand. Please! We're not presuming to dictate. Dear me, no! We have always felt that the writer should be free to express that which is in his—ah—heart. But in the last year we've been swamped with these drab, realistic stories. Strong, relentless things, you know, about dish washers, with a lot of fine detail about the fuzz of grease on the rim of the pan. And then those drear and hopeless ones about fallen sisters who end it all in the East River. The East River must be choked up with 'em. Now, I know that life is real, life is earnest and I'm not demanding a happy ending, exactly. But if you could—that is—would you—do you see your way at all clear to giving us a fairly cheerful story? Not necessarily Glad, but not so darned Russian, if you get me. Not pink, but not all gray, either. Say—mauve!"

Just Some Girls.

There is effective pathos as well as humor in this volume, pathos of character and of situation. We get it in the outcry of Josie Fifer as she contemplates Sarah Haddon's triumph.

"She's got everything a woman could wish for. Me, I haven't got a thing. Not a blamed thing! And yet they say everything works out in the end according to some scheme or other. Well, what's the answer to this, I wonder? I can't make it come out right. I guess one of the figures must have got away from me."

There is tragedy in the career of the "gay old dog," the leading character in the best story in the book. We are sympathetic with the tears of pretty Julia, who has quarrelled with her sweetheart because of his invalid mother.

"Sadie Corn took the girl's hand in hers."

"Jo's all right! But Jo's mother won't bother you any more, Sadie. You'll never need to give up your house-keeping nest egg for her again. Jo told me to tell you."

"Julia stared at her for one dreadful moment, her fist, with the knuckles showing white, pressed against her mouth. A little moan came from her, that repeated over and over, took the form of words."

"Oh, Sadie, if I could only take back what I said to Jo! If I could only take

back what I said to Jo! He'll never forgive me! And I'll never forgive myself!" "He'll forgive you," said Sadie Corn; "but you'll never forgive yourself. That's as it should be. That, you know, is our punishment for what we say in thoughtlessness and anger."

CHEERFUL---BY REQUEST. By EDNA FERBER. Doubleday, Page & Co. \$1.40.

"War Verse"

FRANK FOXCROFT'S *War Verse* is largely a collection of fugitive verse from scattered sources and rather obscure writers, but as there are fine familiar poems by Rupert Brooke, Alan Seeger, Winifred Letts, John McCrae, Gilbert Chesterton and other well known poets the omission of such war poems as Joyce Kilmer's *The White Ships and the Red*, and Margaret Widdemer's *The Old Road to Paradise* seems strange.

With the exception of Alan Seeger's *I Have a Rendezvous with Death*, there are but three or four poems by Americans, Florence Earle Coates and Dr. Henry van Dyke being among those represented. The collection as a whole is eloquent in spirit and of unusually sustained excellence, especially as a number of selections are taken from men in action quite unused to professional writing, and in some cases killed even before their verses were in print.

Mr. Foxcroft has included several poems by Katherine Tynan, one of which, *New Heaven*, we quote:

"Paradise now has many a Knight,
Many a lordkin, many lords,
Glimmer of armor, dinted and bright,
The young Knights have put on new swords."

"Some have barely the down on the lip,
Smiling yet from the new won spurs,
Their wounds are rubies, glowing and deep,
Their scars amethyst—glorious scars."

"Michael's army hath many new men,
Gravest Knights that may sit in stall,
Kings and Captains, a shining train,
But the little young Knights are dearest of all."

"Paradise now is the soldiers' land,
Their own country its shining sod,
Comrades all in a merry band;
And the young Knights' laughter
pleaseth God."

WAR VERSE. EDITED BY FRANK FOXCROFT. Thomas Y. Crowell Company. \$1.25.

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